

Nevada State Health Division

CHURCHILL COUNTY CHILDHOOD LEUKEMIA INVESTIGATION AGENCY ROLES

Introduction

The cluster of childhood leukemia in Churchill County has captured the interest and concern of the local community as well as of people throughout the state and nation. In response, there has been an unprecedented mobilization of resources from both state and federal agencies to apply the best scientific and technical expertise in a quest for an explanation of this event. The following paragraphs briefly describe the key agencies involved and their primary roles.

State of Nevada Agencies

Nevada State Health Division

This is the official public health agency for the State of Nevada. As such, it has the primary responsibility for conducting and coordinating all aspects of the investigation. This includes the activities of the Nevada State Health Officer, the Nevada State Epidemiologist, as well as the other bureaus within the Health Division. The Bureau of Health Protection Services has been involved in collecting water samples from wells serving residences occupied by case families. This Bureau has also been active in performing literature reviews concerning what is known about various environmental contaminants to include radiological sampling/testing. The Bureau of Health Planning and Statistics maintains the Nevada Central Cancer Registry. This database is an essential tool in helping to determine the significance of reported cancer clusters. The Public Information Office, at the Nevada State Health Division, has the primary responsibility for the management of all media affairs, in conjunction with Governor Guinn's Office and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

University of Nevada School of Medicine – State Health Laboratory

This is the official public health laboratory for the State of Nevada. It has been involved in receiving and testing well water specimens that were obtained from case family residences.

University of Nevada, Reno – Cooperative Extension

The mission of the Cooperative Extension is to discover, develop, disseminate, preserve and use knowledge to strengthen the social, economic and environmental well-being of people. This agency has been involved in helping property owners to obtain and understand well water tests. They have also set up community forums to discuss and share information about the leukemia cluster.

Nevada Division of Environmental Protection

The Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (NDEP) is responsible for statewide regulatory programs that protect the health and welfare of the environment for the public. Programmatic areas include air quality, water quality, hazardous and solid waste, mining

reclamation, highly hazardous chemicals and alternative fuels, federal facilities, waste management and water pollution issues. NDEP data on known contamination sites is being used by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) to help identify potential pathways whereby environmental contaminants could have reached case families. Staffs from NDEP are also working with ATSDR and CDC to collect environmental samples from case families and comparison families for the cross-sectional exposure assessment.

Nevada Department of Agriculture

This agency is providing ATSDR and CDC with information regarding the use of agricultural chemicals in Churchill County. This is critical information for the completed pathways assessment being conducted by ATSDR and helps to guide the selection of tests being conducted by CDC.

Nevada Division of Emergency Management

This agency provides resources that allow for appropriate responses to unexpected situations affecting the health and welfare of Nevada citizens. The Division of Emergency Management (DEM) has provided funds to support the costs of well water testing and other activities associated with the Health Division's investigation. They have also appropriated funds to support Fallon Families First, a community-based nonprofit group organized to assist case families in defraying expenses incurred in conjunction with obtaining medical care.

Federal Agencies

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – National Center for Environmental Health

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is recognized as the lead federal agency for protecting the health and safety of the public's health – at home and abroad, providing credible information to enhance health decisions, and promoting health through strong partnerships. CDC serves as the national focus for developing and applying disease prevention and control, environmental health, and health promotion and education activities designed to improve the health of the people of the United States.

The National Center for Environmental Health

The National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH) is part of CDC and provides national leadership in preventing and controlling disease and death resulting from the interactions between people and their environments. This agency is taking the lead in designing and implementing a study to determine if there are significant differences in environmental exposures among case families in Churchill County as compared to control families in Churchill County without leukemia.

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is the principal federal health agency involved in hazardous waste issues. The agency is responsible for preventing or reducing the harmful effects of exposure to hazardous substances on human health and quality of life. This agency is taking the lead in designing and implementing a

study to determine if there are mechanisms whereby case families could have been exposed to known environmental contaminants.

Environmental Protection Agency

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) leads the nation's efforts to safeguard the natural environment and protect human health. The agency is committed to ensuring the safety of air quality, water supplies that are clean and safe to drink, food supplies that are free from dangerous levels of pesticide residues, and community protection from toxic chemicals. As a part of carrying out its mission, the EPA maintains environmental laboratory facilities that will be utilized by CDC and ATSDR for the analysis of environmental specimens collected as part of their studies.

United States Geological Survey

The United States Geological Survey (USGS) serves the nation by providing reliable scientific information to describe and understand the Earth; minimize loss of life and property from natural disaster; manage water, biological energy, and mineral resources; and enhance and protect our quality of life. This agency has conducted broad studies of ground water quality in the Lahontan Valley and is currently repeating this study to determine if there have been recent changes. As a part of the current study, additional well samples are being collected from case residences and from wells located in close proximity to the jet fuel pipeline. These data will help to provide additional information that is pertinent to both the CDC and ATSDR studies.

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CHURCHILL COUNTY CHILDHOOD LEUKEMIA INVESTIGATION COMMUNITY PARTNERS

City of Fallon, Nevada

In the last year, the City of Fallon has worked closely with the Nevada State Health Division to spearhead communication efforts to disseminate accurate information about the cluster investigation. Mayor Tedford and the City Council have focused on the following four objectives in order to mediate the investigation's impact on the city:

- To provide care and comfort to the families who have been affected by the leukemia cluster.
- To ensure access to information by sharing all knowledge pertaining to the cluster.
- To assist with the Nevada State Health Division's investigation by alerting officials to any alleged causes or rumors regarding the cluster.
- To assess and address the long-term economic impacts on the City of Fallon.

Two years ago, the City of Fallon retained a nationally recognized environmental and engineering consulting firm, Shepherd Miller, to conduct chemistry testing of the city's water. The City has exceeded required testing requirements, in both the frequency of testing and the types of contaminants. Additional tests have been completed for contaminants that are linked, or suspected to be linked, to leukemia. None were found. Water tests also show no contamination from fuel, radiation, pesticides or herbicides.

In April 2001, Fallon Families First was established by Mayor Ken Tedford and the City Council in order to provide much needed financial assistance to patient families.

Naval Air Station, Fallon

Naval Air Station, Fallon has provided full cooperation to the State-led investigation by making its records and data available, allowing testing on base facilities and housing, and encouraging military families to be control families for the biological and environmental sample collections. The base, and the Navy as a whole, is fully committed to assisting with the search for a cause to the cluster. NAS Fallon has also established a Community Action Advisory Team (CAAT) on base to facilitate open communication among all involved parties and to provide all relevant information to Navy families as soon as possible.

Community United Response Team

Members across community subgroups have joined in the Community United Response Team (CURT), which grew out of community stress evaluation workshops. CURT is dedicated to providing community-based information and coordinating services in response to the leukemia cluster. They seek to:

- ensure patient and family services are available to the case families;

- educate residents about ALL and AML in general and about the ALL cluster in particular;
- assess community needs on an ongoing basis; and
- establish communication networks outward to the community and between state, county, and city groups concerning activities related to the leukemia cluster investigation.

This group has needs for information as well as a need to share information with the investigation team. CURT, in conjunction with Western Nevada Community College, sponsor public meetings related to the investigation.

Western Nevada Community College

Western Nevada Community College (WNCC) participates in regular meetings of the Community United Response Team (CURT), held at Churchill Community Hospital. The college, in cooperation with CURT, hosts public meetings concerning the Churchill County Leukemia Cluster. This responsibility includes arranging for facilities and/or equipment, moderating panel discussions and/or questions-and-answer sessions, video recording of the proceedings, working with municipal, state and federal agencies as required.